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SUBJECT: LEBANON: 2009 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

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[1](#)B. STATE 122733

[1](#)1. While the threat of terrorist activity kept Lebanese security agencies on high alert throughout the year, 2009 was characterized by increased governmental efforts to disrupt suspected terror cells before they could act. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), in particular, were credited with the capture of wanted terrorist fugitives and the containment of sectarian violence.

[1](#)2. Several designated terrorist organizations remain active in Lebanon. Hamas, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), Fatah al-Islam (FAI), Al-Qaeda in Lebanon, Jund al-Sham, the Ziyad al-Jarrah Battalions, and several other splinter groups all operate within Lebanon's borders. Hizballah, which is a legal entity and a major political party, is represented in Lebanon's cabinet and parliament.

[1](#)3. In 2009, terrorist violence and counterterror activity included the following incidents:
-- On five separate occasions -- January 8 and 14, February 21, September 11, and October 27 -- Katyusha rockets were fired from southern Lebanon into Israel. No casualties were reported from any of the incidents. The Al-Qaeda-inspired Ziyad al-Jarrah Battalions claimed responsibility for several of the attacks.

-- On March 24, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) defused an explosive device near the home of former Lebanese President Amin Gemayel and arrested a Syrian, Youssef Mohammad al-Mohammed, who is currently imprisoned.

-- On June 17, The Lebanese Army thwarted an attempt to drive a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device into the Ain Al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon. Hasan Merhi, a FAI member was arrested in connection with the incident.

-- In July, the Lebanese Army arrested Syrian citizen Mounjed al-Fahham, believed to be a high-ranking Al-Qaeda leader in Lebanon, at Beirut International Airport. Investigations revealed that al-Fahham intended to smuggle FAI spiritual leader Oussama Chehabi, known as Abou Zahra; FAI leader Abdel Rahman Awad; and Abdel Ghani Jawhar, wanted for 2008 attacks against LAF soldiers in Tripoli, out of Lebanon.

-- On August 19, an LAF intelligence unit arrested Lebanese citizen Wissam Tahbish, reported to be a key member of Jund al-Sham. Tahbish was the primary suspect in the 1999 assassination of four Lebanese judges in Sidon.

-- On September 17, a Lebanese military court convicted five Palestinians of armed attacks, including a January 2008 bombing aimed at United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers. The one member in custody was sentenced to three years of hard labor while four fugitive members, convicted in absentia, were given life sentences.

¶4. The June 7, 2009, parliamentary elections, an event widely considered vulnerable to politically motivated violence, passed peacefully under the watch of international observers and a fully deployed LAF. Aside from some polling place scuffles, the elections were considered peaceful. Saad Hariri, leader of the Western-oriented March 14 alliance defeated the March 8 opposition allied with Syria and Iran. Hariri, who was named prime minister-designate, formed a national unity government that included Hizballah after nearly six months of negotiations. The new government obtained a vote of confidence on December 10.

¶5. Incoming PM Hariri pronounced that strengthening the LAF and internal security would be a hallmark of his administration. General Jean Kahwagi, LAF commander since 2008, has publicly listed counterterrorism, internal security, and suppression of sectarian violence as his top priorities. The U.S. government has an active security assistance program with the LAF as well as with the other security agencies that includes both training and equipment.

¶6. LAF commanders stressed that the LAF has strengthened its surveillance capabilities over the 12 Palestinian camps and four Syrian-backed Palestinian military bases within its borders. Nevertheless, a porous border with Syria, weak internal camp security, and LAF reticence to enter the Palestinian refugee camps all contribute to fears of another confrontation with an armed group, similar to the 2007 Nahr al-Barid conflict. The most widely predicted venue for such a clash is in Lebanon's most populous refugee camp, Ain al-Hilweh, near the southern city of Sidon. The camp is well known for Hamas-Fatah intra-Palestinian violence and as a suspected safe haven for fugitive FAI terrorists.

¶7. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559 called for respecting the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon, the end of foreign interference in Lebanon, and the disarming and disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. While the Lebanese government was committed to fulfilling the provisions of UNSCR 1559, it maintained that Hizballah's disarmament should be accomplished through a National Dialogue rather than by force. The last round of talks, headed by President Sleiman, occurred in December 2008 and failed to achieve progress on developing a "National Defense Strategy" to address the disposition of Hizballah's weapons. The electoral campaign and lengthy government formation process prohibited the convocation of the National Dialogue in 2009, but the new government's ministerial statement acknowledges the right of the Lebanese "resistance" (interpreted by many as referring to Hizballah's militia), along with the army, to recover occupied territory and confront external aggression.

¶8. The dismantling of four Palestinian military bases controlled by Syrian-backed groups remained a concern for the LAF. The Qousaya Base, which straddles the border with Syria and allows easy access for fugitives and smugglers, is of particular concern. Activity in these bases reportedly remained quiet in 2009, although the LAF can do little more than monitor their activity without political support to dismantle them. The new ministerial statement calls for the elimination of Palestinian weapons outside the refugee camps and obliges the government to provide security for Palestinian refugees.

¶9. Lebanon's border security remained problematic. The Government of Lebanon still does not exercise control over parts of the border in the Hizballah-dominated Bekaa Valley, in addition to the wider problem of Hizballah's military presence in the southern suburbs of Beirut and southern Lebanon. Over the course of the year, conflicting reports surfaced of weapons smuggling from Syria and Iran to Hizballah and other militant groups in Lebanon. Reports from UNIFIL and the LAF said there was no conclusive evidence of arms smuggling to Hizballah in the UNIFIL area of operations south of the Litani River. UNIFIL and the LAF described a suspected Hizballah arms cache that exploded in July in the southern village of Khirbet Selim as containing weapons pre-dating the 2006 war and UNSCR 1701. Nevertheless, Hizballah officials publically stated that the organization is now more heavily armed than it was before the 2006 war with Israel.

¶10. UNSCR 1701 called upon Lebanon to secure its borders at

all entry points to prevent entry of arms, weapons of mass destruction, or related material without its consent. In May 2007, the UN Secretary General dispatched a border security team to Lebanon (the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team or LIBAT) to assess the monitoring of Lebanon's border with Syria. In July 2008, a second assessment team (LIBAT II), responsible for assessing the implementation of the recommendations of LIBAT I, was sent to Lebanon. The overall assessment of LIBAT II was that the borders were as penetrable and insecure as they were in 2007 and that the rate of implementation of LIBAT I's recommendations was insufficient. Due to the acknowledged lack of progress since 2008, no follow-up assessment was made in 2009.

¶11. In June 2009, then-Prime Minister Fouad Siniora announced the government's intention to improve border security. In July, an LAF-headed team produced a comprehensive border security management plan, for which the UN Special Coordinator on Lebanon (UNSCOL) is coordinating further technical evaluation with donor assistance. The Lebanese security agencies lack strong interagency cooperation, so progress on implementing the integrated border management plan moved slowly. Some gains were achieved on port security through better radiological screening of incoming shipping containers, and upgraded customs inspection stations on the eastern border improved border inspections.

¶12. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, based in The Hague, on March 1 replaced the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC) as the body charged with the prosecution of persons responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and other Lebanese public figures, many critical of Syrian interference in Lebanon. All of these attacks remained unsolved at year's end.

¶13. Two international conventions supported by the USG remained pending approval. The International Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing was sent back to the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee for further study, and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism was not submitted by the Foreign Ministry for cabinet approval due to reservations by the Finance Ministry.

¶14. Lebanon hosted the 2009 Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENA-FATF) and played a leadership role in the US-MENA Private Sector Dialogue. Lebanon's financial intelligence unit is the Special Investigation Commission (SIC), an independent legal entity empowered to investigate suspicious financial transactions, lift banking secrecy, and freeze assets. It investigated 116 cases involving allegations of money laundering, terrorism, and terrorist financing activities. The SIC referred requests for designation or asset freezes regarding Hizballah and groups affiliated with Hizballah to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the Lebanese government does not require banks to freeze these assets because it does not consider Hizballah a terrorist organization.

¶15. Lebanese authorities maintained that the amnesty for Lebanese individuals involved in acts of violence during the 1975-90 civil wars prevented the government from prosecuting terrorist cases of concern to the United States. These cases included individuals involved in the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847, during which a U.S. Navy diver was murdered; the bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1983 and 1984; and the abduction, torture, and murder of U.S. hostages in Lebanon from 1984 to 1991. Mohammad Ali Hamadi, convicted in a West German court in 1987 of air piracy, murder, and possession of explosives for his part in the TWA hijacking spent 18 years in a German prison before he was paroled in December 2005 and was believed to be in Lebanon. The United States continued its efforts to bring him to trial before a U.S. court and has formally requested his extradition. The United States does not have an extradition treaty with Lebanon.

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